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Original article

Forging transnational ties from below: Challenging the Brazilian mining giant Vale S.A. across the South Atlantic

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses how the internationalization of the Brazilian mining corporation Vale S.A, particularly its incursion into Mozambique, has given rise to transnational contestation efforts to resist extraction, from below and along a South-South axis. It does so by approaching the politics and practices of mobilization of the International Articulation of those Affected by Vale (AV), paying special attention to the ties forged between Mozambican and Brazilian civil society. This paper contends that the AV's transnational activism and mobilization strength is context-dependent and defined by given political opportunities, which affect actors' capacity and propensity to mobilize against Vale. Focusing on the determinants shaping the AV's engagement in contentious politics, this paper analyzes which political opportunities have contributed to its establishment, how resources were mobilized to pursue transnational collective action and to push for change, and to which extent shifting political and economic circumstances in Brazil and Mozambique have affected mobilization prospects. This paper provides a critical, bottom-up perspective on the outward expansion of Vale as a Southern mining multinational and contributes to the literature on resistance to extractivism, exploring such dynamics in a transnational and South-South configuration.

1. Introduction

In recent years, Brazil has been affected by a struggling economy and considerable political turmoil (Boito and Saad-Filho, 2016; Garmany and Pereira, 2018). In the meanwhile, Brazilian mining giant Vale S.A. (henceforth Vale) has faced a series of setbacks and negative appraisals in light of the destructive and lethal tailings dam tragedies at iron ore extraction sites in Brumadinho (2019) and Mariana (2015), both in the state of Minas Gerais, Brazil. Yet, not that far back, assessments used to take a different tone. For most of the 2000s and early 2010s, favorable domestic and international circumstances allowed the Brazilian state to increase its diplomatic standing (Abdenur and Marcondes, 2014; Burges, 2017; Cezne and Hamann, 2016), and Vale to seek new resource frontiers abroad (White, 2013; Moldovan, 2018; Milanez et al., 2018). This has been particularly noticeable in Mozambique, where Brazil laced the increase of its economic footprint into the language of cooperation, solidarity and cultural proximity (Alden et al., 2017) and Vale was awarded the concession of the Moatize coal reserves – one of the world's largest unexploited coal deposits (ADB and OECD, 2008: 464). Vale's arrival is among Mozambique's largest foreign direct investments (FDI) following more than a decade of conflict (1977–1992) and has raised hopes of a shift in economic landscapes: from one dependent on Western aid to one centered on investments, new partnerships with the "emerging powers", and South–South cooperation (Alden and Chichava, 2014; Alden et al., 2017; Nogueira et al., 2017).

This paper brings a critical, bottom-up perspective to Vale's expansion as a Southern mining multinational. It does so particularly in the context of Brazil–Mozambique relations by discussing how the internationalization of Vale has concomitantly provided opportunities for contestation synergies to be explored and articulated from below and along a South-South axis. In this vein, this paper describes and analyzes the origins and politics of the mobilization of the International Articulation of those Affected by Vale (*Articulação Internacional dos Atingidos e Atingidas pela Vale*), or simply the Affected by Vale (*Atingidos pela Vale*, henceforth AV), which was established in 2009. Focusing on the transnational ties forged between Mozambican and Brazilian civil society within the AV, the paper picks up on alternative flows and experiences of (inter-)Southern cooperation and highlights how and under which circumstances these have been harnessed to challenge Vale's extractive activities in both countries – and beyond. As such, this paper provides a timely, empirically backed contribution to scholarship approaching resistance dynamics in the extractive industries (see Acuña, 2015; Conde, 2017) while adding to a burgeoning literary analysis of South-South civil society partnerships and advocacy networks (see Bond and Garcia, 2015; Shankland and Gonçalves, 2016; Milhorance

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and Bursztyn, 2017).

Building on "political opportunity theory", particularly as it is developed in the works of Tarrow (1998, 2005) and Meyer (2003, 2004) on the politics of social mobilization, this paper argues that the AV's ability to transnationally engage in contentious politics is shaped by specific opportunities. These are given by the external, and often shifting, circumstances in the broader political system (termed "the political opportunity structure" in this theory), which in turn affect actors' ability and propensity to mobilize – and to do so effectively. Relying on these theoretical insights, this paper's argument is underpinned by the following research questions: How did Vale's globalized scope and internationalization act as a political opportunity for the establishment of the AV, and how did this contribute, more specifically, to the forging of transnational ties between Mozambican and Brazilian civil society? How did the AV engage in transnational, collective action, and to which ends? And to which extent have variations in the surrounding political opportunity structure, particularly in Brazil and Mozambique, changed the AV's incentives and prospects for mobilization over the years?

The article draws on data from two field trips to Mozambique, carried out in June 2018 and between October and December 2018, and one research visit to Brazil in April 2019. The fieldwork in Mozambique was conducted in the country's capital city Maputo, in the central province of Tete, where Vale's Moatize coal mining concession is located, and along the length of the Nacala Corridor, the railway that connects Vale's mine to the Nacala port facilities on Mozambique's northern coast. The research visit to Brazil encompassed the cities of São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Brasília. As part of the research for this paper, I have interviewed representatives of grassroots groups within the AV in Mozambique and Brazil,[1] three Brazilian academics (two of whom have ties to AV social movements) who are researching Vale and Brazilian FDI in Africa,[2] a former Vale executive, and Brazil's Foreign Minister Celso Amorim (2003–2010) and conducted a focus group with Mozambican extractive industry business consultants. The information obtained during fieldwork is complemented by the analysis of key AV texts such as the Articulation's annual reports and meetings' dossiers as well as website and social media content.

This paper proceeds as follows. First, I provide a brief introduction to Vale, reflecting on its role in the global extractive economy as well as on its degree of political and economic interconnectedness with the Brazilian state. In the context of the firm's international expansion, I highlight how Vale's extractive business in Mozambique was aided by state and corporate rhetorical references to "South-South cooperation," putting the company's investments in a positive light. Second, I demonstrate how the literature has increasingly interrogated this instrumentalization of South-South credentials in the legitimation of economic projects, to which forms of civil society resistance, including along a South-South axis, have become increasingly common. Similarly, I underscore how the literature has long reflected on the contested nature of Vale's extractivism. I thereafter propose the notion of political opportunity structure to analyze the AV's politics of mobilization, arguing that it offers productive angles to investigate the hitherto underexplored interfaces between resistance to extraction and the emergence of South-South contestation ties. Third, by focusing on the connections forged between Mozambican and Brazilian civil society, this paper analyzes the politics of mobilization of the AV more specifically. This is done in three steps, each of which addressing one of the outlined research questions above. I start by arguing how Vale's outward expansion, particularly in the late 2000s, set the context and offered opportunities for the emergence of the AV and how this has reinforced transnational advocacy connections between Mozambican and Brazilian civil society. This is followed by a discussion of the AV's mobilization practices and strategies, addressing how the AV has transnationally engaged in contentious politics and pushed for change. Lastly, this paper argues how shifting domestic trends in both Brazil and Mozambique have resulted in a less favorable political opportunity structure for the AV, hampering its capacity to mobilize and to forge allegiances in recent years.

2. Vale S.A.: disaster-ridden yet an exportable Brazilian national champion

On January 25, 2019, in Brumadinho, in the state of Minas Gerais, Brazil, a wave of mud was unleashed from a burst dam holding the byproducts of iron ore mining. Along its path downhill, the mudflow from the ruptured reservoir destroyed nearly everything, from homes to company offices and cafeteria, claiming the lives of hundreds of people (New York Times, 2019). The disaster occurred at Dam 1 of the *Córrego do Feijão* iron ore mine, and the mining waste – technically known as tailings – contaminated surrounding rivers and soil. The death toll has been determined to be around 250, making the Brumadinho catastrophe the world's most deadly dam-related tragedy since 1985.[3] Little over than three years earlier and only 120 km away, a similar iron ore tailings dam burst in the Brazilian municipality of Mariana had released a large volume of toxic sludge, which had lasting social and environmental impacts. The mud flow killed 19 people, displaced hundreds, and is described as Brazil's worst (human-induced) environmental disaster (Fernandes et al., 2016). The Brazilian mining corporation Vale is central to both disasters. In Brumadinho, the *Córrego do Feijão* mine has been under Vale's concession since 2001. The dam that collapsed in Mariana belonged to Samarco Mineração S.A., an enterprise jointly owned by Anglo-Australian mining multinational BHP and Vale.

In light of these disasters and the ensuing visibility brought by media headlines, public opinion about Vale has been dominated by outrage and anger (The Guardian, 2019; Financial Times, 2019). In the wake of events in Brumadinho, the firm has been de-listed from the UN Global Compact (United Nations Global Compact (UNGC, 2019), and an investigation committee linked to the Minas Gerais legislative house has asked for the criminal indictment of some of its executives and employees (Cherem, 2019). Yet, in spite of this reputational damage, the company's image in business and political circles used to be an overwhelmingly positive one; regarded as an icon of Brazil's successes, a national champion. Vale oversees operations across 30 countries; in revenue terms, it was ranked among the world's top five mining companies in 2018, and it is the world's foremost extractor of iron and nickel ore (Vale, 2018c; Statista, 2019). Vale's global outreach and its role in the extractive commodity market has in many ways become the prime example of a reconfigured geography that saw Southern countries and their firms emerging as important players and investors (Luo and Tung, 2007; Ramamurti and Singh, 2009; Marinov and Marinova, 2012). This is further underscored by the long "capitalism of linkages" between Vale and the Brazilian state: it went from being a wholly government-controlled company upon its establishment in 1942 until its privatization in 1997, to its current institutional arrangement under private ownership in which the government is able to exert influence through the so-called "golden shares" (which give the government veto rights on strategic matters) and equity-holding shares held by the state-

[1] In Mozambique, this included interviewing representatives of an organization providing judicial assistance to mining-affected communities and representatives of a mineworkers' trade union. In Brazil, an interview was conducted with members of a social movement advocating on behalf of populations affected by the construction of dams.

[2] At the time of fieldwork, all these scholars held academic positions at universities. One of the researchers had ties with a civil society organization advancing alternative development policies in South America, and another one worked with a movement calling for social justice along Vale's logistic corridors in Brazil.

[3] At the time of writing, a death toll of 251 was confirmed; 19 victims are still missing. For the updated figures: http://www.defesacivil.mg.gov.br/

owned Brazilian National Development Bank (BNDES) (Lazzarini, 2011: 21; Burges, 2017: 114). Along with other leading Brazilian firms, especially in the engineering and energy sectors, the mining corporation has also benefited from state diplomatic support and public finance lending (Casanova and Kassum, 2014; Hochstetler, 2014).

Vale has sought to expand its activities not only within, but also outside Brazil, particularly in the 2000s and early 2010s, amid the bright prospects underlying the "Brazil rising" narrative, coupled with the favorable winds of the commodities super-cycle (Da Silva et al., 2009). Besides the one in Mozambique, it has acquired mining concessions and operations in Canada, New Caledonia, Indonesia, and Zambia (Vale, 2018a) and has attempted to engage in iron ore extraction in Guinea (Slattery, 2019). Africa in particular was key in this outward move. According to Vale's former CEO Roger Agnelli (2009), gaining a foothold in Africa represented an opportunity for the company due to the continent's still unexplored reserves of natural resources. Moreover, Vale stood to make profits in markets that were overlooked by Northern firms who had been affected by the turbulence of the 2008 financial crisis. The fact that Africa is closer to China and the other emerging markets in Asia than Brazil is another advantage, as was suggested by a former Vale executive interviewed for this research: "exporting minerals from Africa would considerably cut the distance and delivery time to our major clients in Asia."[4]

A telling example of this process is Vale's expansion into Mozambique, where the company won a bid in 2004 to explore the Moatize coal deposits in the central Mozambican province of Tete (Campbell, 2014). The terms of the concession with the Mozambican government were defined in 2007, and mining operations effectively started in 2011 (Vale, 2017). Estimated to be the world's fifth largest coal deposit, the Moatize mine supplies coal for metallurgical and energetic purposes and is expected to have a life-time of approximately 35 years, with reserves predicted to be 2.4 billion tons (ADB and OECD, 2008: 464; Bryceson and MacKinnon, 2012). Given the centrality of logistics in Vale's business model, a multi-modal mine–rail–port infrastructure – the Nalaca Corridor – was developed to enable the transport and subsequent export of the mineral through the exclusive coal terminal at the deep water port of Nacala-a-Velha on Mozambique's northern Indian coast.

Vale's advancement into Mozambique grew out of a series of formal and informal ties forged by and between the Brazilian and Mozambican governments. As explained to me by Brazil's former Foreign Minister Celso Amorim, in the beginning of Vale's advancement, the Brazilian government helped by mediating Vale's interactions with the Mozambican government: "Brazil has offered support. And sometimes we even had to call the attention of Vale's representatives to things."[5] This was complemented by claims pointing at Vale's positive differentiation in light of its Southern and Brazilian origins. As former Brazilian President Lula underscored during the visit of Mozambican President Joaquim Chissano to Brasília in August 2004: "Mozambicans won't regret it if Vale wins the bidding, because beyond exploiting coal it can help in other projects…. It is a company that has a strong social sense and vision" (Lula da Silva, 2004). In what became his signature quote when speaking on Brazil–Africa relations, Foreign Minister Celso Amorim said that "for every African problem, there is a Brazilian solution."[6] He subsequently made the point that this "favors the (Brazilian) presence, technical cooperation, and also companies, naturally (in Africa)."[7] Mozambican political stakeholders and business representatives have echoed these views. Speaking about Vale's investments in Mozambique, the country's Foreign Minister Oldemiro Baloi remarked that: "By investing I do not just mean what they are doing in coal, financially investing, but also in terms of capacity building" (Burges, 2017: 123). For a Mozambican business consultant, Vale's arrival was illustrative of a new era of partnerships with the Southern emerging powers and nurtured aspirations of an unprecedented economic development: "After Mozambique's civil war, Vale was the first company to establish itself. From the government's perspective, it was an opportunity to improve the business environment and to attract other companies."[8] Speaking on behalf of the corporation, Vale's CEO has referred to the firm's arrival in Mozambique as a sign of the integration between Africa and the Americas, which he envisioned as a "new Pangea" – alluding to the supercontinent that existed millions of years ago as a part of which the coasts of Brazil and West Africa were interlocked (Agnelli, 2009).

3. Resisting (Vale's) extraction along a South-South axis

Arguably, the geographical, historical, and social similarities of Southern countries do not necessarily mean that the implementation of development and business projects will be unproblematic. In this vein, scholars have denounced the deployment of narratives resorting to Southern, developing country, and post-colonial identities, especially when deployed by China and the other Southern BRICS countries, as means to conceal "sub-imperial" interests – expressed through the search of spheres of influence and material gain by the new centers of capital accumulation (Bond and Garcia, 2015; Bond, 2016). Similar arguments have permeated analyses of Southern FDIs and development projects in Africa. While these projects resort to a different rhetoric, many scholars have argued that at the ground level they overwhelmingly focus on the same economic sectors – mostly extractive and agricultural – that Western states have long held on the continent (see Mohan and Power, 2008; Shaw et al., 2009; Johnston, 2017), thus configuring a "new scramble" for Africa (Carmody, 2016).[9] Other scholars have considered that the experiences brought by investments and development projects from Southern countries often have contested and exclusionary roots at home (see Alden and Davies, 2006; Sauvant et al., 2010; Scoones et al., 2016). At the same time, the effects of these initiatives have been discussed and challenged by civil society networks, ranging from autonomous, localized networks, to networks involving partnerships with larger, professionalized NGOs, politically like-minded state actors, and, increasingly, through the exchanges in and articulation of South-South transnational advocacy networks across the involved nations (Osuoka and Zalik, 2010; Schulpen and Habraken, 2013; Shankland and Gonçalves, 2016; Muhr, 2016; Milhorance and Bursztyn, 2017). In line with Angosto-Ferrández (2014), this last kind of network accounts for the people-based dimension of the Global South, where shared experiences of exclusion, marginalization, and exploitation produce a collective transnational political identity.

As noted by Shankland and Gonçalves (2016), the notion of the "South-South", underpinned by similarity-based claims, has thus offered a productive imaginary and legitimizing power to *both* the promotion and contestation of Southern countries' economic and development projects elsewhere in the developing world. In this regard, the South-South transnationalism of contestation efforts, binding groups across the involved nations, is enabled by and provides a counter-hegemonic challenge to mainstream (state and corporate) uses of the term "South-South". In the context of Brazil–Mozambique relations, this "tension" has been well-documented and researched in the case of the ProSAVANA rural development program, established around 2011 and involving the governments and private sectors of Brazil, Mozambique,

[4] Interview, former Vale executive. São Paulo, Brazil, April 2019.

[5] Interview, Mr. Celso Amorim, former Foreign Minister of Brazil (2003-2010). Rio de Janeiro, April 2019.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Focus group, extractive industry business consultants. Maputo, Mozambique, June 2018.

[9] For a historical perspective on extractive-driven flows across the South Atlantic, see Ofosu-Mensah (2017).

and Japan. Through the adoption of Brazil's tropical agribusiness experiences, the program was premised on a strategy of creating an enabling environment for commercial agriculture in northern Mozambique, particularly in the Nacala corridor's catchment area (see Fingermann, 2015). A range of scholarly accounts on ProSAVANA has, however, pointed out its controversial nature: it neglected the views of small-holders and threatened land tenure, human rights, and food security (Nogueira and Ollinaho, 2013; Wolford and Nehring, 2015; Durán and Chichava, 2017). As a result, the tropical agribusiness internationalization effort embodied by the ProSAVANA has prompted a "South-South cooperation of the peoples of Brazil and Mozambique" (Aguiar and Pacheco, 2016), leading to the engagement of Brazilian grassroots actors with experiences from a similar, commercial-driven agricultural program in Brazil – the PRODECER, implemented in the 1970s – with Mozambican activists (Schlesinger, 2014). These parties included a range of Brazilian and Mozambican civil society actors such as peasant movements, social justice NGOs, and academics. The ProSAVANA transnational contestation network these actors formed has acted by means of exchanging information, monitoring developments, organizing field visits, drafting letters to authorities, and producing audiovisual awareness-raising campaigns, among other practices (Cabral, 2015; Zanella and Milhorance, 2016; Shankland and Gonçalves, 2016). The network has managed to obtain more transparency from the authorities about the intents of ProSAVANA, to secure room for broader consultations, and, later on, to halt parts of the program altogether (Shankland and Gonçalves, 2016: 37).

The attention researchers and grassroots groups paid to ProSAVANA has also brought Vale into the picture. This is because Vale has demonstrated interest to create value-chains along its Mozambican Nacala logistic corridor through agribusiness investments and because large-scale agricultural and mining engagements have overlapping impacts (leading to land-tenure insecurity, environmental degradation, violation of human rights) on local societies (see Nogueira and Ollinaho, 2013). As such, a number of actors mobilizing against ProSAVANA have also integrated into the AV – including, for instance, the notorious Brazilian Landless Movement MST and Mozambican peasant union UNAC. Yet, in this case, the literature has chiefly explored transnational civil society opposition to Vale through the rural resistance dimension engendered by the ProSAVANA struggle (see Cabral and Leite, 2015; Shankland et al., 2016; Milhorance and Bursztyn, 2017), speaking, for instance, to debates on the internationalization of agrarian contestation platforms (see Edelman, 2003; Borras, 2010). This scholarship has positioned Vale as a key player and enabler, among other Brazilian state and private actors, of agricultural development in the Nacala Corridor, reinforcing exclusionary patterns of land commodification against which rural-focused and agrarian social movements have mobilized along a South-South axis.

This literature has, however, seldomly situated the *transnational* nature of popular contestation to Vale within the breadth of scholarly insights on resistance and social protest to extractivism, particularly in the mining sector (see, for instance, Gordon and Webber, 2008; Acuña, 2015; Hanna et al., 2016; Conde, 2017). Resorting to conceptualizations of extractive spaces as neoliberal enclaves (see Ferguson, 2005; Sidaway, 2019) and their interlinked patterns of dispossession (Bebbington, 2012), securitization (Hönke, 2013), inequality, social differentiation (Carmody, 2016), and labor and land commodification (Gordon and Webber, 2008), a range of case studies on Vale has demonstrated how mining dynamics resulted in spaces of suffering, vulnerability, and socio-economic conflict, generating protests and forms of social contestation in response (for Canada, see King, 2017; for Indonesia, see Murdifin et al., 2018; for New Caledonia, see Filer and Le Meur, 2017). The literature has long underscored the enclavic form of development around mining areas in Brazil, particularly with regard to Vale's Carajás Mining Complex in the Amazon, the world's largest iron ore mine and thus a critical revenue source to the firm (Vale, 2018b), reflected by social marginalization and the absence of a wider structural transformation of the economy (Rodrigues, 2003; Da Silva et al., 2011; Coelho, 2014). The environmental threats to the Amazon, the indigenous populations and local communities that the construction of the mining machinery and related infrastructure, such as hydropower dams and railways, poses have been similarly documented (Treece, 1987; Fearnside, 1989; Dornas et al., 2019). As a result, various Brazilian civil society groups – across labor, popular sovereignty, leftist parties, peasant, and liberation theology movements – have challenged Vale and other mining corporations, increasingly joining forces at the national-level (Santos and Milanez, 2015; Lyra, 2016); though often constrained by corporate attempts to co-opt and criminalize dissent (Milanez et al., 2019). This has recently been complemented by a growing amount of works documenting the disruptions and civil society reactions and articulations in the wake of the Mariana and Brumadinho disasters (Labonne, 2016; Milanez and Santos, 2019; Lyra, 2019; Owen and Kemp, 2019). In Mozambique, Vale's project-induced displacement practices in particular have merited wide scholarly attention, becoming illustrative of the many misdeeds and the exclusionary nature marking the country's nascent mining industry (Lesutis, 2019a; Van der Ploeg and Vanclay, 2018; Wiegink, 2018; Kirshner and Power, 2015; Human Rights Watch (HRW, 2013). The continuous precarity within resettlement sites (Lesutis, 2019b) and the hazardous pollution levels from coal mining (Zitamar, 2019) are pointed to as major sources of discontentment, leading to various forms of protest and collective mobilization.

While Vale's impacts have been documented and investigated in line with the firm's global extraction activities, the transnational dimension of resistance against the corporation remains a missing perspective. While taking note of the AV and its efforts to articulate internationally, the literature on the opposition to Vale's extractivism has privileged localized resistance efforts or, at most, country-specific networks (see Tubino et al., 2011; Wanderley, 2012). More in-depth accounts of the AV have been emphatically descriptive (see Sousa, 2014), self-referential (carried out by members, see Marshall, 2015a, 2015b; or the organization itself, see Atingidos, 2016), or, as mentioned above, linked with ProSAVANA's agricultural struggle. More broadly, forms of civil society transnational activism and protest to mining have been facilitated through the role of Western, professionalized NGOs, including Human Rights Watch and Oxfam (see Human Rights Watch (HRW, 2013; Oxfam, 2015), industry-led platforms like the International Council for Mining and Metals (ICMM) (see Curtis, 2007), and through community and mining-affected grassroots initiatives at the regional level such as the Alternative Mining Indaba in southern Africa (see Matsika et al., 2014), and Latin America's Observatory of Mining Conflict (see Svampa, 2012). But examples of Southern transcontinental efforts and connections – for instance, between Africa and Latin America – remain largely unexplored.

The analysis of the AV below seeks to fill these voids, drawing on the ties forged between Brazilian and Mozambican civil society in particular to explore the dynamics of resistance to extractivism in a transnational as well as a South-South configuration. As such, the analysis seeks to contribute to the literature on contestation to (Vale's) extraction while bridging this with a burgeoning literary analysis of South-South civil society partnerships and advocacy networks. Tarrow's (1998, 2005) and Meyer's (2003, 2004) notion of "political opportunity structure" provides a productive perspective to do so. Tarrow (1998: 19) defines political opportunity structure as the "consistent – but not necessarily formal, permanent, or national – dimensions of the political struggle that encourage people to engage in contentious politics." Meyer (2004: 126) argues that central to the political opportunity perspective is the fact that "activists' prospects for advancing particular claims, mobilizing supporters, and affecting influence are context-dependent." Accordingly, the world outside a movement plays a key role, enhancing or inhibiting prospects for mobilizing, prioritizing particular claims over others, influencing the type of alliances forged, selecting which strategies are viable, and allowing for engagement with institutional politics and policy (Meyer, 2004). Changes in public policy, the

reactions of elites, the surrounding political economy, and geopolitical trends are, for instance, important external circumstances affecting a movement's collective strength, symbolic efficacy, and capacity to enact change (Meyer, 2003; Tarrow, 2005). In line with what Tarrow (2005) suggests, grievances in and of themselves do not automatically lead people and groups to organize and deploy resources to push for social change. Alongside the identification of common grievances and targets, collective action thus requires the *opportunistic* mobilization of resources (material, human, and symbolic), framing of demands, and deployment of contestation strategies to push for change. In the following sections, I discuss these dynamics with regard to the transnational activism embodied by the AV.

4. Vale's globalization and internationalization as a political opportunity for transnational contestation

The head of a Mozambican civil society group offering legal assistance to mining-affected populations in Moatize told me they "articulate to challenge what is articulated globally."[10] According to him, the global scale mining companies like Vale operate on ensures the smooth flow of commodities to global markets, linking self-sufficient, securitized spaces to global supply chains. Yet it accentuates exclusionary patterns of accumulation, drives the dispossession of the vulnerable, and increases socio-economic marginalization, as the literature conceptualizing mining spaces as neoliberal enclaves has found. The interviewee's admission also accounted for the launch of and his organization's participation in a transnational network to contest Vale, the International Articulation of those Affected by Vale (AV). Established in 2009, the AV brings together a range of grassroots groups and activists: from labor unions, human rights groups, lawyers, peasants' associations, and environmental activists, to academics, public policy representatives, cultural organizations, and faith groups.[11] In line with Vale's international and multifaceted operations – encompassing mining of varied resources, but also logistics and dealings in the financial sector – leverage is seen as better exercised in a similarly transnational and plural fashion. A prominent voice within Vale resistance circles, Judith Marshall (2015b: 11) has written that "networks linking only communities or only environmentalists or only trade unionists have limited effectiveness."

The AV's founding meeting, held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in April 2010, included organizations and participants from 14 countries. The event was preceded by the drafting of a dossier, which mapped many of Vale's engagements in Brazil and abroad, and identified the respective groups involved in disputes with the company (Atingidos pela Vale, 2010). Viewed as a point of departure, the document was described as the first collective effort to challenge both "the image that Vale constructs for itself at the symbolic level" and Vale's representation as a Brazilian icon (idem, 6). According to a Brazilian researcher involved in the AV's founding, while in the beginning there was no centralized leadership in order "to avoid an NGO-ization of the articulation and to keep it open for various movements," an executive secretariat, often represented by a key AV activist, was later on created to help with the mobilization of resources and the organization of events.[12]

Though the AV is seen in this paper as a platform that enabled the forging of South–South ties from the ground up between Brazil and Mozambique, the origins of the movement is directly tied to events in Canada. In 2009, more than 3000 workers at Vale Inco's nickel mines in Sudbury, Port Colborne, and Voisey's Bay, Canada, went on strike.[13] Represented by the United Steelworkers (USW) trade union, laborers have brought operations to a halt following Vale's attempts to renegotiate pension benefits and bonus payments in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis and nickel's consequent price decline. After a series of stalled talks, the increasingly bitter strike lasted for almost a year in Sudbury and Port Colborne and for 18 months in Voisey's Bay, making these events the longest walkout in Vale's history (Peters, 2010; King, 2017). To the Brazilian researcher involved in the AV's founding, "Brazilians go home" messages were common on the strike banners in Canada.[14] These developments have in turn given rise to the articulation of a transnational solidarity network between those affected by Vale in Canada and in Brazil. Noting an inversion of exploitation patterns – a Southern firm exploiting Northern workers rather than the other way around – my interviewee declared: "For the first time there was a reverse solidarity from Brazil towards them. This case being a South-North cooperation with Canada."[15]

Concurrently, what started as an effort to support and solidarize with the Canadian strike has laid the initial foundations for the establishment of a broader, transnational network to contest Vale's corporate practices and mining activities worldwide. This has corresponded with other concomitant efforts. For instance, the organization of a workshop on the internationalization of Brazilian firms during the 2009 World Social Forum in Belém, Brazil, brought together representatives of communities, mostly from across Latin America, affected by Brazilian corporate projects.[16] Personal ties and given coincidences have also mattered: Brazilian activists and researchers completing their postgraduate studies in Canada at the time were instrumental in facilitating exchanges between groups affected by Vale in Canada and in Latin America. While the events with the USW in Canada were crucial to kickstart and give shape to an international contestation articulation against Vale, the subsequent resolution of the Canadian strikes in 2010 has tempered the union's mobilization impetus within a transnational setting. "The Steelworkers were fundamental. But after they won the strike, they kind of jumped out," the Brazilian researcher involved in the AV's founding said.[17] Although the ties with the Canadian workers became lukewarm, setting up an international movement against Vale nonetheless contributed to the establishment and strengthening of other connections.

This is what happened in the case of the Brazilian and Mozambican parties. After the initial, mutual lack of awareness about Vale-related struggles in the country of the other, the creation of the AV meant that "the Brazilian relationship with Mozambique went from water to wine."[18] Arguably, language and cultural affinities have played a key role in fostering and facilitating such ties, but personal factors were once again crucial in this case. Relations were specially boosted in the wake of a grant obtained by a group of Brazilian researchers linked to the AV in 2012 to conduct a comparative study and fieldwork on the extractive industries in Brazil and Mozambique. As such, contacts that were already in place due to the AV's establishment – but that were often mediated through a third-party – acquired a real, tangible dimension. Speaking about their trip to Mozambique, the Brazilian researcher involved in the AV's founding declared that "our comprehension of the Mozambican reality, our comprehension of Vale has become totally different."[19] This has reportedly set the stage for other subsequent civil society trips and exchanges among those affected by Vale across the South Atlantic, from Brazil to Mozambique and vice-versa.

[10] Interview, NGO director. Tete, Mozambique, October 2018.

[11] The full overview of founding members can be found at Atingidos Pela Vale (2010: 156-157).

[12] Interview, researcher. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, April 2019.

[13] Vale's Canada operations followed the acquisition of Canadian nickel mining corporation Inco in 2006, leading to the establishment of Vale Inco – nowadays Vale Canada Limited.

[14] Interview, researcher. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, April 2019.

[15] Ibid.

[16] The World Social Forum is an annual meeting of grassroots organizations championing counter-hegemonic globalization.

[17] Interview, researcher. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, April 2019.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid.

The geopolitical conjuncture at the time, as discussed, was one of greater international prominence of the Southern emerging economies and their firms, leveraged by the 2000s commodities super-cycle, and as such set the stage for the widening global role of companies like Vale (see Fernández et al., 2017). The 2008 financial crisis, fueled by anti-globalization sentiments, has in turn exposed that the Vale's outward expansion was not without friction, as demonstrated by the "Brazilians go home" banners in Canada. In line with this paper's literary review, an increasing mutual awareness about Vale-related struggles across Latin America and Africa in anti-globalization fora increased the perception that a South–South economic landscape does not necessarily translate into better corporate behavior on the ground – as otherwise suggested by the above-cited state and corporate discourses. All of these factors have not only provided a *raison d'être* for transnational protests against Vale but have also increased the political value of such a contestation platform, which endorsed broader, post-2008 anti-globalization calls and took a critical perspective on the emerging – yet little challenged – flows of South–South economic relations. Adding to that, the resolution of the Canadian strikes, which saw some of the workers' demands met and to which the establishment of the AV provided an important backing, reinforced a sense of political efficacy and encouraged subsequent mobilization, particularly among the Brazilian and Mozambican grassroots groups affected by Vale. This speaks to Tarrow's (2005) argument that the increase in internationalization – expressed here by denser relations across states and private sector officials – poses challenges, thus creating an opportunity structure to channel resistance to globalization and inviting transnational activism and the creation of cross-border coalitions.

Moreover, in line with the Mozambican government's political strategy to pursue a development model premised on the extractive projects (Orre and Ronning, 2017: 10), Vale has started its coal mining operations in the country in 2011. Notwithstanding, the novelty of related large-scale investments in Mozambique coupled with the government's inexperience in managing such processes and local civil society groups' limited to non-existent exposure to multinational companies led, as documented by the literature, to a range of mishandlings and rights violations, notably with regard to project-induced displacement practices. All these signals in the political and economic conjuncture have however, provided opportunities for the articulation and the strengthening of ties between the Brazilian and Mozambican parties within the AV. The opportunity to engage in a transnational mobilization effort was not only a way to gain insight and knowledge into synergistic experiences elsewhere for the Mozambican actors, but also an opportunity to advocate for socially-sound parameters for corporate and state responsibilities in face of Mozambique's incipient extractive boom. Moreover, the outset of Vale's coal-mining, the establishment of ProSAVANA, both in 2011 at the height of Brazil's "corporate push" into Mozambique (see Rossi, 2015), reinforced by the existence of a range of overlapping grievances, further contributed to create momentum for transnational resistance connecting Mozambique to Brazil, and vice-versa. The expansion of Brazilian FDI in Mozambique has thus offered a political opportunity structure for grassroots groups across the two nations to act internationally, raising awareness about common struggles and establishing dialogue platforms (see also Milhorance and Bursztyn, 2017). Besides building on these external opportunities and incentives, acting together contentiously, as suggested by Tarrow (2005) and Meyer (2004), requires the mobilization of material, human, and ideological resources to voice demands and to pursue resistance goals. I now turn to this dimension of the AV's struggle, addressing how the network's contestation potential was mobilized and to which ends.

5. Taking (transnational) action against Vale

"How can we pinch Vale's image?", inquired a representative of a Brazilian advocacy organization acting on behalf of populations effected by dam-related issues, who was also linked to AV.[20] To answer her own question, she claimed that "counter-information is our major strategy" and highlighted how many of the AV's actions seek to challenge Vale's international image, which she regarded as tainted by both blue- and green-washing techniques.[21] As such, the AV exposes and opposes how the company publicly depicts itself as a contributor to development, economic growth, and employment generation. They contest the advertised discourse that this is all carried out in ways consonant to international standards through, for example, association with the UN Global Compact– and hence the reference to the blue color – as well as sustainable and environmentally sound, i.e. green, practices. This view, which the AV challenges, comes across particularly strong in Vale's yearly Sustainability Reports, through which the company conveys a message of social and environmental responsibility, with regular mentions of compliance with international safeguards on human rights, labor, the environment, and good governance (see Vale, 2019: 4).

To provide the missing, bottom-up counterpoint, the AV has published a series of Unsustainability Reports (2010, 2011, 2013, 2015). The reports have, among other things, criticized corporate abuse and perceived violations of human and labor rights, offering an instrument for grassroots groups and communities to tell their own stories. In a somewhat satirical fashion, the outputs are in similar reporting and graphic formats as Vale's Sustainability reports. For instance, whereas Vale's official 2015 Sustainability Report (Vale, 2016: 13) states that the company's mission is "to transform natural resources into prosperity and sustainable development"; the AV's 2015 Unsustainability Report (Atingidos pela Vale, 2016: 2) states that Vale's mission is "to transform natural resources into catalysts for continually growing profits for shareholders, disregarding the rights of workers, communities, traditional peoples and future generations, as well as their expectations to a life with dignity." The AV's website and other outputs similarly highlight how the movement's (counter-) communication makes regular parallels to Vale's communication materials. For instance, graphic patterns applied on Vale's official promotional material are used in the AV reports' illustrations to depict environmental, labor, and social abuses experienced by the affected populations. Another significant outcome the movement's "expose and oppose" strategy yielded is that Vale was elected the "Worst Company in the World" in the 2012 Public Eye Awards, held at the margins of the Davos World Economic Forum. Aided by a strong online campaign propelled by the AV, the corporation was "awarded" for "repeated human rights abuses, inhumane working conditions, and the ruthless exploitation of nature" (Public Eye, 2012). Another particularly effective counter-information move was through the targeting of Vale shareholders by becoming a shareholder itself. To do so, AV activists have collectively bought Vale stocks, which entitled them to participate in shareholders' meetings. In these meetings, activists would express their views and make demands from within, using their position as leverage over the other shareholders' finances and their proximity to the corporation to convey messages and to get responses to their demands.

The AV has also held regular, movement-wide meetings "to debate experiences and design strategies to confront violations committed by Vale all over the world" (FASE, 2015a). Five annual meetings were organized between 2010 and 2015, and the gatherings were typically followed by the drafting of a final letter expressing the concerns of the populations affected by Vale's activities. Criticism would also be directed to the governments of countries in which Vale operates, for their degree of interconnectedness with the company – through, inter alia, owning shares, subsidized lending, lenient legislation – and for contributing to the perpetuation of inequalities and violations of their own populations' rights (FASE, 2015b). Moreover, some of these reunions

[20] Interview, NGO representative. São Paulo, Brazil, April 2019.
[21] Ibid.

were strategically timed and held at symbolic locations. For example, the first, founding meeting in 2010 took place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, where Vale is headquartered. It occurred as the Canadian strike was unfolding and it took place in the same period as the company's general meeting of shareholders was scheduled for. The third gathering, also held in Rio, took place during the UN Rio + 20 Conference in 2012. The fifth and last meeting to date occurred in the city of Ouro Preto, at the heart of Brazil's so-called Iron Quadrangle in the state of Minas Gerais, where Vale has originally started mining in the late 1940s. Some of these meetings were also accompanied by the organization of field visits (*caravanas*) to Vale's mining areas, assembling civil society representatives of various countries and backgrounds. These visits were meant to provide eyewitness accounts of the reality of Vale's projects and a platform for comparisons and exchange of experiences. This was the case for the AV's founding meeting in 2010, when the organization of two *caravanas* preceded the event: one to the mining sites in the state of Minas Gerais, and the other covering Vale's "northern system" in the Amazon, where the Carajás Mining Complex is located (see Atingidos pela Vale, 2010: 141–150). As described by the earlier-quoted Mozambican NGO director who participated in the Carajás visit, the trip provided an opportunity "to see the situation *in loco*, as a way to counter-balance: contrasting (the Carajás rail corridor) with the Nacala Corridor (in Mozambique), drawing comparisons, analogies, and we saw that Vale's behavior is the same."

In the wake of the Mariana and Brumadinho catastrophes, grassroots groups within the AV also play a crucial role in monitoring the tragedies closely, serving as up-to-date, bottom-up and continual source information, especially whenever media attention started to fade away. This is particularly highlighted through the work of the Brazilian and AV-affiliated *Águas e Serras Casa Branca* social movement, which has played an active role in the aftermath of the tragedies, monitoring corporate as well as state responses and voicing the opinions of residents and victims in the affected areas (Atingidos pela Vale, 2019b). The AV has similarly issued statements recalling several of the warnings given by communities, activists, and employees ahead of the tragedies. Preemptively, in their view, these could have possibly prevented or mitigated the calamitous consequences had the company and public authorities listened and taken demands and complaints more seriously (see Atingidos pela Vale, 2019a). Yet, despite the recent spike in announcements and website posts following the Brumadinho tragedy, the Articulation has experienced an overall downtrend in recent years. Specially after 2015, this has been evidenced by the halt of the annual meetings and the fact that its presence has been mainly restricted to the online domain. Building on Tarrow (1998, 2005) and Meyer's (2003, 2004) notion of political opportunity structure guiding this paper, it may be concluded that while given political opportunities create incentives to take action, variations in political processes surrounding the ensuing struggle may also hamper collective mobilization. In the next, final section of this paper, this downtrend is account for by the changing circumstances in the broader political and economic environments in both Brazil and Mozambique. I argue that these "externalities" have contributed to a less favorable political opportunity structure for the transnational (and also South–South) activism embodied by the AV, altering strategic postures and the incentives for coalition-building.

6. Is transnational activism withering in light of a less favorable political opportunity structure?

The turbulence in Brazil's political landscape, set in motion by nation-wide street protests in 2013 (see Vicino and Fahlberg, 2017), was aggravated around 2015 by a stagnating economy and a corruption investigation that halted several of the country's leading firms' internationalization processes (see Melo, 2016; Lima-de-Oliveira, 2019). This has led many Brazilian grassroots groups within the AV to concentrate efforts and scarce resources on growing domestic challenges. Priority has thus been given to confronting austerity reforms and the perceived loosening of environmental, labor, and social-welfare safeguards that came with the enactment of economic reforms and the sweeping changes in the country's leadership and political configuration – from a left-wing-oriented administration, which was ousted by a contentious impeachment process, to a decisive swing to the right symbolized by Bolsonaro's rise to power in 2019. At the same time, Brazilian groups countering extraction have become increasingly articulated into a mainly domestically-oriented and broader mining resistance – as opposed to Vale-specific – platform, namely the Movement for Popular Sovereignty in Mining (MAM), which gained potency around 2013 (see Lyra, 2016). Many of the MAM's grassroots groups have also remained within the AV and the two movements are in many ways complementary. Notwithstanding, the fact that notorious and large mass movements such as the Brazilian Landless Workers' Movement (MST) and the Movement of People Affected by Dams (MAB) have increasingly channeled their anti-mining efforts through the MAM has "cooled down" the AV.[22] Moreover, with the central node of the AV's strategic thinking, networking, and resource mobilization passing through Brazilian organizations such as FASE, Justiça Global, and PACS, a more inward-looking strategic posture has similarly drained energy away from the transnational civil society flows nurturing the AV.[23] In times of more challenging circumstances, the diffuse nature of the articulation – devoid of a structured, permanent leadership and more dependent on the *ad hoc* efforts of given individuals in NGOs, academia, or trade unions – reinforced these difficulties.

In Mozambique, this has been followed by the pragmatic forging of other partnerships. For instance, the aforementioned organization providing legal assistance to mining-affected populations in Moatize has increasingly engaged with Danish and Canadian NGOs in anti-Vale efforts, as exemplified by their initiative to exert pressure on pension funds in these northern countries that are shareholders in the mining corporation.[24] Moreover, as Lesutis (2019a) suggests, the hardening of tensions between the country's governing Frelimo party and the main opposition party Renamo – fueled by intermittent violent clashes from 2013 through 2017 – has created a dynamic of political violence and repression, which the recent insurgency in the gas-rich northern province of Cabo Delgado has made even worse.[25] These recent developments have sparked fear among those engaged in civil society mobilization efforts, as the government has been incentivized to increase surveillance and violent state reactions to dissent, driving Vale-affected populations, for example, to employ less confrontational strategies to deal with their precarity in mining spaces (Lesutis, 2019b: 47). Finally, while the Mozambican society has had only limited exposure to and only seldomly mobilized around large-scale economic projects in the wake of Vale's establishment during the late 2000s (around when the AV was founded), the economic landscape has undergone major transformations. The intensification of coal mining, gas discoveries, and agricultural investments throughout the 2010s has provided more opportunities – tied to increased awareness on the impacts of economic projects – for civil society coalition-building, either with grassroots groups elsewhere in the country or other international partners (see Symons, 2016).

In light of a less favorable configuration of political opportunities, especially after 2015, the AV's activism has been expressed less through on-site, face-to-face interactions (i.e. meetings, field visits) or broader outreaching initiatives (i.e. detailed reports on the affected populations, global campaigns) and more through targeted, often reactive actions following a major contentious Vale-related event (i.e. condemnation notes, requests demanding accountability from authorities). Regular

[22] Interview, researcher. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, April 2019.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Interview, NGO director. Tete, Mozambique, October 2018.
[25] For more information and updates, see: https://www.acaps.org/country/mozambique/crisis/violent-insurgency-in-cabo-delgado

activities such as the participation in shareholders' meetings have not been discontinued, but have been prominently pushed forward by the individual efforts of given activists. On the other hand, the AV's continued online presence, especially the Articulation's website and Facebook profile, has enabled the movement to draw on e-activism to voice concerns and demands, and to build institutional memory by means of keeping track of past initiatives. Moreover, faster cost-free, cross-border communication platforms such as WhatsApp have been crucial to keep ties and contacts alive, thus contributing to preserve the movement's "skeleton". Communication and social media platforms may similarly offer the possibility to revive mobilization prospects once there are more favorable political opportunities for their realization. Paradoxically, major catastrophes such as Brumadinho are telling in this regard. The fact that Brumadinho made international headlines, occurred after a similar major disaster (Mariana), and was simultaneously a social, labor, and environmental tragedy offers new momentum for reviving Vale contestation efforts in a transnational, multifaceted fashion. A Brazilian activist, hopeful that there would be a re-strengthening of international efforts to challenge Vale – while recalling the pledges of the then newly inaugurated Bolsonaro government to loosen environmental safeguards and mining regulations in Brazil and Vale's move to expand its coal mining concession in Mozambique – declared that Brumadinho can be in many ways a "necessary evil", offering a timely opportunity "for us to put forward initiatives and try to change things."[26]

7. Conclusion

In this paper, I have built on the notion of political opportunity structure to discuss how the globalized scope and increasingly internationalized presence of the Brazilian mining corporation Vale S.A has concomitantly offered opportunities for contestation to the firm to be exercised transnationally and along a South–South axis. I have done so by analyzing the politics of mobilization of the International Articulation of those Affected by Vale (AV), paying particular attention to the ties forged between Brazilian and Mozambican grassroots groups. In this vein, this paper has attempted to contribute to the literature on resistance dynamics in the extractive industries, exploring this in a transnational configuration, and with an emphasis on the articulation of civil society efforts across the Global South.

In line with the conceptual grid foregrounded in this paper, the mere existence of a transnational set of struggles against Vale and grievances inflicted by it is not sufficient to explain why social groups have articulated internationally to challenge the firm. The *political opportunity structure* – the external circumstances affecting the struggle – also plays a key role, affecting a movement's collective strength, efficacy, and capacity to enact change. I have discussed these dynamics with regard to the transnational activism embodied by the AV, analyzing the political opportunities that have led to its emergence, how these opportunities were harnessed in collective contestation strategies, and the role that a shifting political and economic conjuncture play in shaping mobilization prospects.

I have argued that favorable geopolitical and economic circumstances – defined, for instance, by the greater international protagonism of the Southern emerging economies and a commodities super-cycle and in the late 2000s – have not only contributed to Vale's expansion into Mozambique and elsewhere but have also set a favorable stage for articulation to be forged, from below, against these processes. While the AV's transnationalism has emerged out of a peculiar effort aimed at supporting Canadian mining workers on strike, it has consolidated and strengthened other resistance ties, as was the case between Brazilian and Mozambican civil society. In the context of Brazil–Mozambique relations more specifically, the forging of these South–South connections from below contributed to advance a critical, bottom-up perspective to the otherwise benevolent state and corporate South-South framings on Vale's suitability to explore coal in Mozambique.

These political opportunities were harnessed in contestation strategies that have brought awareness to a shared spectrum of Vale-related struggles and grievances across the Southern Atlantic and elsewhere, strengthening and increasing the geographical reach of resistance efforts. As such, the AV's transnational challenge to Vale was leveraged by means of amplifying counter-information flows, drawing on corporate shareholders to exert pressure, promoting international campaigns, and keeping memories of mining tragedies alive. Yet, ensuing changes in the political and economic landscapes, especially in Brazil and Mozambique, have in turn hampered this mobilization capacity, highlighting some of the challenges for sustaining a broader mining-resistance platform across the Global South. For the Brazilian grassroots groups in the AV, considerable political turmoil and a bleak macroeconomic outlook in Brazil have contributed to a reorientation of mobilization goals from the transnational to the domestic level. In Mozambique, this was followed by grassroots pragmatically engaging in other civil society alliances in light of the country's growing extractive economy and by the adoption of a less confrontational stance against a backdrop of increasing political repression. In recent years, the transnational activism embodied by the AV has thus been expressed less through regular and steady arrangements and more through a reactive, often digitally conveyed posture to events involving Vale. Yet, even in times of a less favorable political opportunity structure, the Articulation was not entirely dissolved. The online domain and cross-border communication platforms have enabled the grouping to subsist, which provides prospects for transnational mobilization efforts against Vale to resurge once there are new windows of opportunities, for example in the aftermath of a major tragedy such as Brumadinho.

Declaration of competing interest

None.

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[26] Interview, NGO representative. São Paulo, Brazil, April 2019.

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